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ABSTRACT

A staff development process that uses group-building activities to foster staff collegiality is described in this paper. As schools become involved in restructuring, cooperation and positive working relationships become more crucial for effective school teams involved in participative decision making. Five characteristics of group-building activities include: (1) the breakdown of cliques and factions; (2) positive interdependence; (3) individual accountability; (4) group reward; and (5) a high probability of success. Two sample group-building activities are included. (LMI)

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BEGINNING THE RESTRUCTURING PROCESS: BUILDING COLLEGIALITY

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Boards of education and their administrative teams are confronted with mandates to improve the quality of their schools. At the same time that these demands from parents, the media, influential patrons, and governmental agencies are becoming more strident, financial resources to support needed changes and innovations are declining. If these calls for change heard so frequently are to be effectively answered, restructuring the relationships between staff members to increase productivity and achievement is essential.

Many teachers and administrators have had little experience in working together. They have been accustomed to closing their classroom or office doors and working intensively with the students or staff assigned to them. As a result of this isolation, the organizational culture of many schools and districts has been one of individual effort and accomplishment. Professional and personal jealousy and lack of collegial trust and support have too often resulted.

As board members begin to plan for staff improvement with their administrative teams, they almost always find the need to restructure these traditional relationships. Teachers, administrators, and other staff members now must work together as members of school teams to assess data, define mission, allocate resources, and make decisions. Undertaking such activities without first building supportive and nurturing climate for collaboration often results in frustration and failure.

Lyman and Foyle (1990) recommend the use of group building activities to build staff cohesion and nurture the positive working relationships that are necessary as restructuring begins. Group building activities provide opportunities for staff members

who may not have worked closely together before to encounter one another in positive ways that support collaboration and build mutual trust. As colleagues experience the benefits and affective rewards of positive interaction with other staff, the foundation of cohesiveness is created. This process can be a lengthy one, sometimes requiring several years. When administrators try to involve staff in collaborative projects without such a foundation, however, the outcomes can be disastrous.

According to Foyle and Lyman, group building activities have five important characteristics. First, group building activities break down cliques and factions through heterogeneous grouping in which teachers from different grade levels and of different personalities are asked to work together on simple, non-threatening tasks. It should be the goal of the leader to have each staff member work with every other staff member in at least one such activity as part of the process of encouraging cohesiveness and collegiality.

Second, the group building activities require positive interdependence. The tasks are designed so that, even if the staff members wanted to do the task individually, it would be difficult or impossible to do so. For example, the leader may distribute only one copy of the materials necessary to do the task, thus requiring group members to share.

Third, group building activities should involve some individual accountability. The leader needs to monitor the groups to make sure all staff members are participating in group activities. Feedback sheets can be collected from staff members or individual conferences with staff members can be scheduled to identify ways in which outcomes

from the group activities are being used by the individual staff members to enhance their job performance.

A fourth component of group building activities is a group reward for participating successfully in the group. If the task is fun and staff members enjoy working together on the task, the enjoyment of the task may be sufficient group reward. Food can be an effective reward--a plate of doughnuts does wonders for group cohesion! Sincere praise from the leader also lets the staff know that their working together is valued and appreciated. Concluding a meeting a little earlier than expected and giving staff members the extra time unexpectedly is perhaps the best reward of all for working together in group building activities.

Perhaps the most important factor in a group building activity is that the activity have a high probability of success--that is, that those participating in the activity will be able to accomplish the task and feel as though working together resulted in a positive outcome in which they can feel pride and ownership.

Group cohesion and collegiality can be enhanced by using group building activities which involve staff members in working with each other cooperatively and positively. Success in smaller group building tasks builds important attitudes which can transfer into the larger, more lengthy projects of shared decision making. The process is a time consuming one that cannot be rushed. Each district will need to proceed at its own rate.

Sample Group Building Activity

THE MATCHING GAME

Objective: Teachers will identify areas of mutual agreement.

Procedure: Teachers are asked to choose a partner or the principal can pair teachers together. Each pair is given a copy of the worksheet and is instructed to find as many matches as they can in the designated time (10 minutes is appropriate).

After pairs of teachers have worked on the activity, pairs come together as groups of four to find matches. They may use ideas from the pair activity, or come up with new ideas as needed.

The principal may ask groups to share their response to a specific item, such as "something we'd like to see more of in the world."

Follow-up: This activity also works well with students in grades 3-6. Teachers may want to try the activity with their students.

MATCHING GAME WORKSHEET

A food we like	Something we like to do	Something we like about school	A song we like
Something nice about our families	Something that we'd like to see more of in the world	Something we are wearing	Something we expect of a friend
A color we like	A television show we watch	A holiday we like	A person we admire

Sample Group Building Activity

BALLOON CONNECTIONS

Objective: Teachers will successfully complete an activity requiring collaboration.

Procedure: Each teacher is given a long balloon. Teachers are asked to inflate and tie their balloons. (Teachers are encouraged to ask each other for help if they need help inflating or tying.)

Each teacher selects a partner. Using one of their balloons, the principal instructs each pair of teachers to support the balloons between them: first, between their two foreheads; next between their elbows; and finally, between their backs. As the teacher pairs support the balloons between their backs, the principal asks them to jump up and down lightly in place while still supporting the balloon.

The partners then are instructed to pick up the other balloon and use it to connect to another pair, by foreheads, elbows, or backs. The goal is to have each member of the staff connected by balloons. This is a great photo opportunity, so the principal will want to have a camera handy.

Follow-up: All elementary students enjoy this activity. Individual teachers may want to try the activity with their students.

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